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# **International financial transfer by foreign labour: An analysis of remittances from informal migrants**

**Research Memorandum 2013-15**

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# International Financial Transfer by Foreign Labour: An analysis of remittances from informal migrants

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## Abstract

This paper addresses the socio-economic position of undocumented migrants. It focuses in particular on the financial transfers of domestic workers in the Netherlands to their country of origin. Undocumented migrants often find a job in small firms and as domestic workers. They maybe employee or self-employed, and spend a considerable part of their income in the form of remittances. Our study aims to identify the determinants of remittances by this particular group of migrants. On the basis of a micro-survey among undocumented workers in the Netherlands, we find an income elasticity of remittances of about 0.5, which means that low-income workers spend more on remittances than high-income workers. We also find that having children has a big impact: if the migrants have children in the host country they remit considerably less money, whereas if they have children in the country of origin they clearly remit more. We also conclude that remittances tend to shrink with the duration of stay. So, as time passes, the strength of altruism and/or the incentive for the migrants to insure themselves by investing in their country of origin becomes smaller.

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## 1. Introduction

Informal economic activities, such as house cleaning, taking care of the elderly, and childcare, are by now a widespread feature of advanced economies. Furthermore, nowadays, as the economic crisis and fierce free market competition put more pressure on small businesses and households, small businesses are trying to find ways to reduce the costs.

The demand for low-cost labour creates employment opportunities for undocumented migrants, who are ready to accept a low wage for many hours. Scase and Goffee (1982) indicated that informality is the very essence of small businesses per se, a time-honoured set of practices designed to minimize cost, risk, inconvenience, and paperwork. Moreover, for undocumented migrants finding a job is essential, for two main reasons: first, to finance their own needs in the host country, and, secondly, to support their family back home.

Although tough rules have been imposed by advanced economies on the flow of illegal migrants, this flow has not yet been stopped. Instead, it has encouraged the global criminal economy, especially in the form of human traffickers who bring illegal migrants into advanced countries. The Economist (16 October 1999, cited in Jones et al., 2006) indicated that in the late 1990s human traffickers earned £ 20 billion per year by smuggling over 30 million migrants per year.

According to various studies, in 1991 the total number of undocumented (also called 'informal' or 'unregistered') immigrants in Western Europe was estimated at around 2.6 million, and this number was forecast to have doubled by the end of the decade (Bodvarsson and van den Berg, 2009). The Netherlands has also experienced an increase in the number of illegal migrants in recent years. Heijden et al. (2011) estimated the total number of illegal immigrants for the year 2009. their estimate was that around 97,100 illegal immigrants (with a 95% confidence interval from 60,700 to 133,600) were then living in the Netherlands. Earlier estimates by Heijden et al. (2006) were that, in the period of 1997 to 2003, the Netherlands received approximately 50,000 to 200,000 illegal immigrants. Commenting on the widespread rise of illegal migration, Castells (2000, cited in Jones et al. 2006) draws attention to the contradiction between an ever-intensifying migratory drive, on the one hand, and ever more restrictive immigration controls, on the other.

This paper reviews the literature on the employment of undocumented migrants, and their remittance behaviour. The literature on undocumented migrants usually points to economic factors as the main reason for illegal migration. Migration can be considered as insurance for the rest of the family still in the country of origin. Studies reveal that families in developing countries often try to send young members of their family to developed economies.

This paper is structured as following: Section 2 presents a literature review on the employment of undocumented migrants, and also addresses the role of remittances. Section 3 discusses estimation methods. Section 4 describes the data. Section 5 provides our empirical analysis, and Section 6 concludes.

## **2. Employment Situation and Remittance Behaviour of Informal Migrants**

### **2.1. The position of undocumented workers**

In recent years, advanced European economies have become aging societies. The labour shortages worked as pull factors in attracting both legal and illegal migrants to these countries. Furthermore, the majority of these developed countries are increasingly focusing on welcoming highly-skilled and highly-educated immigrants from developing countries, while there are a number of restrictions on the movements of low-skilled immigrants (Gheasi et al., 2012). Therefore, the majority of low-skilled migrants are entering the host country via global illegal or criminal networks. Staring (1999) insists that undocumented migration is entirely an artificial social construct, since, without restrictive immigration policies it would not exist. Furthermore, migrant networks play a crucial role in continuing to facilitate the movement of undocumented migrants over formally-closed borders, and migration is correlated more with economic growth than with immigration policies (Harris, 2002).

The literature on the economic impact of these migrants mostly points to the complementarity and substitution effect of migrants with native workers. Concerning the substitution effect on household studies have revealed that employment of a domestic worker increases the participation of natives in the market (Cortés and Tessada, 2011; Freire, 2011; Furtado and Hock, 2010). Thus, the increase in the formal activity leads to an increase in informal activity (Marcelli, 2004). Informal economic activity has widely been debated in general by many authors, but specific attention has been paid to women and immigrants (Tienda and Raijman, 2000; Sassen, 1984, 1988; Hoyman, 1987).

Raijman (2001) indicates that the distinction between formal and informal economic activities does not necessarily depend on the character of the final product, but on the manner in which it is produced and exchanged. Small businesses are confronted with challenges to cut costs and to prolong their presence in the market. Therefore, the survival of small businesses in some advanced economies is related to the employment of undocumented migrants (Jones et al. 2006). These migrants are not allowed to work officially. Therefore, they accept lower wages; they are flexible about working in different shifts (during the day, night, overtime work); and they are easy to fire. Moreover, from the discipline point of view, Jones et al. (2006) reported from a British case study that undocumented migrants are described by employers as reliable, grateful, hardworking, and flexible.

In recent years, owing to lifestyle changes, undocumented migrants also play an important role in providing services to households. Here, they are typically working without a fixed contract, which means that they are essentially self-employed entrepreneurs, a specific segment in the world of small business economics. They perform different tasks such as cleaning, cooking, shopping, care for the elderly, babysitting, etc. In this connection, Sassen (1991, 1996) addresses social polarization, in which high-income households depend upon low-skilled services, such as domestic services, cleaning, cooking, etc., which attract immigrant workers.

Undocumented migrants are deprived of enjoying the same legal rights as legal immigrants. These migrants tend to have fewer employment opportunities, and they often face different forms of

discrimination and exploitation, e.g. lower wages, long working hours, poor working condition, abuse in the work place, higher house rent, lack of access to education, etc.

## **2.2 Remittances**

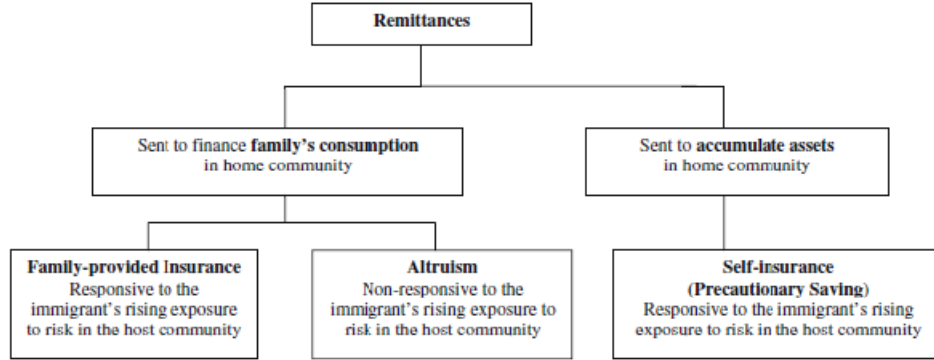
The recent increase in the number of migrants has also been reflected in an increase in the amount of remittances. The amount of money remitted by migrants to developing countries increased significantly from only 2 US\$ billion in 1970 to not less than 116 US\$ billion in 2003 (Gammeltoft, 2003; World Bank, 2005). However, these figures do not include the amounts remitted in cash and kind and through informal channels. There is no doubt that the above-mentioned remittances made a significant improvement in the living conditions of millions of people in developing countries. Remittance seems to be one of the bottom-up ways of redistributing and enhancing welfare among the population in the developing countries (Jones, 1998).

There are two opposing views in the literature about remittance and development. Some authors believe that sending remittances leads receiving societies to develop some sort of dependency on remittances. Moreover, as a consequence of the massive departure of young, skilled, low-skilled and educated people, local production declines, and dependency on remittance increases (Rubenstein, 1992; Lipton, 1980). Taylor (1987) in his study of two villages near Cairo suggested that massive migration and employment in high paid jobs in urban areas had created shortages of male labour in the agriculture sector. On the other hand, empirical studies from Latin American, Asian, and African countries have shown that remittances have had a beneficial impact on investments in agriculture and other sectors, and have increased economic activities in the country of origin (de Haas, 2003; Taylor et al., 1996a,b).

Remittances are usually sent to families and friends in the country of origin owing to the migrant's altruistic feelings. One may expect a positive relationship between the amount of remittance and the migrant's income. However, income does not necessarily have a linear effect, because the motive to remit may differ at different points of the income distribution (Cox et al. 1998). Moreover, if we look at the studies of remittance, three motives for sending a remittance (e.g. asset accumulation, altruism, and insurance) have been identified (Lucas and Stark, 1985). However, if we consider the empirical findings, it is very hard to distinguish the asset accumulation and insurance motives of remittance from the altruism motive (Hagen-Zanker and Siegel, 2007). Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo (2006) have further investigated the remittance motives and distinguished the motives between self-and family insurance and altruism. Figure 1 shows the typology of these authors.

It is argued that immigrants with some particular characteristics (e.g. undocumented, lack of experience, poorly educated) are likely to experience lack of job and income security. The study by Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo (2006) shows that those immigrants who lack the above-mentioned characteristics remit more. The same authors found, in their study of the remittance behaviour of Mexican immigrants in the United States, that the proportion of undocumented migrants who remit is 3-percentage points higher than the proportion of documented migrants who remit. Furthermore, the same authors also corrected the data set for some characteristics that could affect remittance behaviour, and then they

found that undocumented migrants are likely to remit 6-percentage points more than documented migrants. This reveals that the uncertainties they experience period an extra stimulus to invest in their country of origin. Figure 1, will be used as a conceptual framework for our empirical study reported in the next sections.



**Figure 1: Motives for remitting**

Source: Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo (2006, p.230).

### 3. Research Methodology

Not all respondents reported the amount of remittance they send to their country of origin. Thus the dependent variable has a censored nature. It is argued that the application of OLS in this case will yield biased results, since the observations are non-randomly selected. Therefore, we applied the classic method to deal with this selection problem, the standard Heckman (1979) two-step approach. Banerjee (1984), and Hoddinott (1994) have applied this approach for estimating the remittance behaviour of migrants (for a discussion on the selection model, we refer to Puhani, 2002).

We will run first an OLS regression:

$$Y_i = x_i\beta + \epsilon_i, \quad (1)$$

where,  $Y_i$  is the size of remittance in natural logarithm form sent by undocumented migrant  $i$  to his/her families, and  $x_i$  represents the personal characteristics of undocumented migrant  $i$  that affect the remittance level (for more information about the dependent variables, refer to Table 1). Furthermore, in order to address the concerns regarding the potential bias in the OLS results, we use the Heckman two-step model. The two-step formulation process can be formulated as follows:

$$y_i = x_i\beta + \epsilon_{1i} \quad (2)$$

and

$$z_i = v_i\beta + \epsilon_{2i} > 0, \quad (3)$$

where,  $\epsilon_1 \sim N(0, \sigma^2)$ ; and  $\epsilon_2 \sim N(0,1)$  with correlation  $(\epsilon_1, \epsilon_2) = \rho$ . Equation 2 corresponds with 1 above, and applies to remittances as far as they are observed. Equation 3 represents a probit type

equation, where  $z_i$  is a binary variable whether or not the remittance is observed. The relevant explanatory variables are denoted by  $v_i$ . In the next section, we describe our data set.

#### **4. Database**

We present empirical evidence from the data used in our empirical analysis were collected as mentioned above on the basis of a pilot project “Undocumented Migrant Domestic Workers”, under the auspices of FNV Bondgenoten (one of the major trade unions in the Netherlands). This labour union tries to connect with undocumented workers who are working in the service sector. Many undocumented workers are a member of this labour union, and by using trusted intermediaries, we conducted 10 interviews, and also distributed two types of questionnaires (online and hardcopy). In total, we received 130 questionnaires. The questionnaires were designed to be completely identical, and both questionnaires took about 25-30 minutes to complete. Moreover, to make the interview understandable for those who did not speak English and Dutch (i.e, Spanish speakers), the interview was done in Spanish. The aim of this questionnaire was to get a better insight into the economic and legal situation of domestic workers in

In our analysis we focus on variables such as: age, gender, monthly amount of remittance, monthly income, work experience, marital status, whether the undocumented migrant has children or not, and, if the undocumented migrant does have children, the children’s living location (in the country of origin, partly in the country of origin and partly in the host country, and in the Netherlands), whether the domestic worker is a ‘live-in’ or ‘live out’ and length of stay. Table 1 below presents the variables and their definitions.

Length of stay is often added in the empirical studies, and mainly has a negative sign. It is argued that the longer a migrant stays in the host country, the less frequently he/she visits the country of origin, and the less is the importance of altruism. This would imply an inverse relationship between duration of stay and level of remittance (Lianos and Cavounidis, 2010; Funkhouser, 1995; Banerjee, 1984). Regarding the relationship between monthly income and level of remittance, most empirical studies find a positive relationship between the migrant’s income and level of remittance (Osili, 2007; Lianos and Cavounidis, 2010).

#### **5. Empirical Results**

The regression results are presented in Table 2 below. Unfortunately, there are a substantial number of respondents who did not report the length of stay (about per cent 30). Given the small sample size and concern about the biased results, we decided to run the regressions with four variants. In Variant I, we drop the length of stay as an explanatory variable. In Variant II, we include the length of stay variable, and only consider respondents who reported this variable. In Variant III, we use the complete sample, where we have inserted the mean value of the length of stay for the missing values, and we added a dummy indicator with a value equal to 1 for the observations where information on length of stay was missing. Finally, in Variant IV, we run the Heckman selection model. It is not difficult to understand that, in Variant III, the estimated coefficients are not affected by the specific value inserted (the mean). Any



other value would lead to the same estimates, except of course the estimate of the coefficient for the pertaining dummy variable.

Work experience in the Netherlands has a positive and statistically significant effect on remittance in the first column of Table 2. The estimate is that, (for those undocumented migrants who are sending remittances), as the years of work experience increase by 10-percentage points, the remittances will increase by 4 per cent, *ceteris parabus*. This variable was removed when we added the length of stay variable in our regression. The decision was to avoid the multicollinearity problem in our analysis (apart from column IV where work experience is used in the selection model).

A positive relationship between income and level of remittance has generally been found in the literature (see, for example, Lianos and Cavoundis, 2010; Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo, 2006). Our finding is in line with this literature. Monthly income is positive and highly significant with respect to the dependent variable. This means that migrants with higher income tend to remit higher amounts. Furthermore, live-in domestic workers are remitting more than live-out domestic workers.

Based on the migrant's altruistic feelings and the economic needs of their family and offspring, we observe that having offspring (dependence) back home raises the likelihood of sending a remittance. The variables which capture the family situation of these undocumented migrants indicate that those migrants who have children in the, country of origin, and those who have children partly in the country of origin and partly in the Netherlands, are, respectively, remitting between 9 and 6 per cent more than those undocumented migrants who do not have children. Our statistical result for offspring is in line with the altruistic behaviour identified in the remittance literature (Osili, 2007; Amuedo-Dorantes and Pozo 2006; Banerjee, 1984).

In columns II, III and IV of Table 2 we added the length of stay. The remittance literature indicates that the longer a migrant lives in the host country, the better he/she knows the host country, and can find a steady job, then, the less are his/her altruistic feelings. Our empirical result for the length of stay is in line with the literature, and indicates that, for each extra year an undocumented migrant lives in the Netherlands, he/she remits 4 per cent less to the country of origin. In columns III and IV, we added observations on workers with an unknown length of stay, which only has a limited effect on the estimated parameters: the coefficients in columns III and IV are in line with those in column II.

As indicated above in column IV of Table 2, we run the Heckman selection model to address the concern about a bias in the OLS results. We find that  $\lambda$  is not statistically different from zero. Therefore, selection bias is not a serious problem in our estimation. The first stage of the Heckman model that reports the estimates for determinants of the volume of remittances, corrected for the sample selection, is quite in line with the direct OLS estimation.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this study we have reviewed the literature on employment of undocumented migrants and their remittance behaviour. Furthermore, we presented empirical evidence concerning the remittances of

undocumented migrants who are working as domestic workers in Dutch households. The literature review of undocumented migrants, as well as the empirical findings, shows that migrants with specific characteristics tend to remit more than those migrants who do not have such characteristics, such as: being undocumented, having lack of work experience, and being poorly educated. We find that there is a positive relationship between monthly income and remittances, and that the income elasticity is about 0.5. This means that, when the income is lower, a larger share of income is remitted. The theoretical framework offers two interpretations: as people get richer, they become less altruistic; or, probably more relevant: as people earn more in the host country, they have more confidence in their current position, and hence they have less incentive to invest in their country of origin. Further, we find that the longer an undocumented migrant lives in the host country, the less he/she is likely to remit. This may again be interpreted in two ways: the longer people stay in the host country, the less priority they tend to give to the people they left behind. But it may mean that a long duration of stay is a signal that the worker can cope with his undocumented status, and hence feels less inclined to invest in the country of origin. The results for children underline the altruism motive: with children in the host country they remit less, and with children in the country of origin they remit more.

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**Table 1: Variables and their definition**

Variable	Definition	Mean
Remittance (€)	Migrant respondents were asked to estimate the total amount of remittance they sent per month. This is the dependent variable (in natural logarithms).	273 (183.17)
Age	In our data set we do not have respondents younger than 18 years old, and older than 56 years of old.	36 (9.383)
Gender	Male =1	0.38 (0.487)
Work experience	The years of work experience in the Netherlands.	3.93 (3.256)
Monthly income	Calculated by, the authors. In our questionnaires (online and hard copy), we asked respondents to indicate the wage per hour and total hours they work per week. This variable is used in the regression in natural logarithm form.	1031 (716.07)
Marital status	This is a dummy variable taking the value of 1 if the undocumented migrant is married or living with a partner, and 0 otherwise.	0.55 (0.498)
No child	This is a dummy variable taking the value of 1 if the undocumented migrant does not have child, and 0 otherwise.	0.45 (0.499)
Children in NL	This is a dummy variable taking the value of 1 if the respondent indicated that he/she has his/her children in the Netherlands, and 0 otherwise.	0.15 (0.358)
Partly in the country of origin and partly in NL	This is a dummy variable. If the children of the respondent partly live in the country of origin and partly in NL, it is equal to 1, and 0 otherwise.	0.38 (0.487)
Children in country of origin	This is a dummy variable. If the children of the respondent live in the country of origin it is equal to 1, and 0 otherwise.	0.02 (0.152)
Length of stay1	The calculation of this variable is based on the question in which we asked respondents to indicate the year they entered the Netherlands.	6.16 (5.624)
Length of stay2	In this variable we added the mean value of length of stay in the unreported cells.	6.16 (4.628)
Unknown	This is a dummy variable taking the value of 1 if the respondent did not report the length of stay, and 0 otherwise.	0.32 (0.468)
Live-in	We have two categories of domestic workers: 'live-in' who work and live in the same household, and 'live-out' who live elsewhere. This variable is a dummy variable: live-in=1 if the undocumented migrant is a live-in, and 0 otherwise	0.03 (0.183)
Dutch language	This is a dummy variable taking the value of 1 if the migrant can speak Dutch, and 0 otherwise	0.57 (0.497)

Standard deviations are in parentheses.

**Table 2: Regression results**

<b>Dependent variable: monthly remittance in natural logarithms</b>				
	<b>Variant I</b>	<b>Variant II</b>	<b>Variant III</b>	<b>Variant IV</b>
Gender (male=1)	0.091 (0.144)	-0.00035 (0.183)	0.0283 (0.136)	0.0239 (0.131)
Age	-0.0138 (0.00842)	0.00194 (0.0111)	-0.00327 (0.00775)	-0.00364 (0.00758)
Work experience	0.0429* (0.0235)			
Log(monthly income)	0.433*** (0.107)	0.577*** (0.127)	0.507*** (0.101)	0.501*** (0.172)
Live-in (yes=1)	0.587* (0.321)	0.160 (0.380)	0.521* (0.312)	0.520* (0.296)
Marital status (married or living together=1)	-0.282 (0.178)	-0.480** (0.232)	-0.326* (0.173)	-0.321* (0.172)
Children in NL	-0.353 (0.216)	0.078 (0.286)	-0.101 (0.224)	-0.107 (0.221)
Children in country of origin	0.860* (0.483)	1.023 (0.674)	0.887** (0.411)	0.844* (0.450)
Children partly in the country of origin and partly in NL	0.629*** (0.195)	0.669** (0.251)	0.630*** (0.190)	0.631*** (0.179)
Length of stay 1		-0.0482*** (0.0167)		
Length of stay 2			-0.0388** (0.0151)	-0.0385*** (0.0148)
Unknown length of stay (dummy unknown =1)			0.235* (0.139)	0.232* (0.132)
Constant	2.631*** (0.783)	1.537** (0.934)	2.090*** (0.742)	2.145* (1.284)
R-squared	0.426	0.477	0.461	
<b>Variables used in selection model</b>				
Dutch language (yes=1)				0.460 (0.406)
Work experience				-0.0427 (0.0565)
Log(monthly income)				0.909*** (0.324)
lambda				-0.036 (0.791)
Rho				-0.064
Sigma				0.561
Constant				-4.656** (1.972)
Observations	93	65	93	102

Notes: Standard errors are in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1. The reference variables are female, live-out, single, and migrants without children.

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